



---

Honors Theses at the University of Iowa

---

Fall 2018

## Nietzsche's Critique of Morality and Revaluation of Values

Omar Bin Salamah

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ir.uiowa.edu/honors\\_theses](https://ir.uiowa.edu/honors_theses)



Part of the [Applied Ethics Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Ethics in Religion Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [Genealogy Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), [History of Philosophy Commons](#), [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#), and the [Sociology of Culture Commons](#)

---

This honors thesis is available at Iowa Research Online: [https://ir.uiowa.edu/honors\\_theses/252](https://ir.uiowa.edu/honors_theses/252)

---

NIETZSCHE'S CRITIQUE OF MORALITY AND REVALUATION OF VALUES

by

Omar Bin Salamah

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the Philosophy

---

David Cuning  
Thesis Mentor

Fall 2018

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
Philosophy have been completed.

---

Carrie Figdor  
Philosophy Honors Advisor

# **Nietzsche's Critique of Morality and Revaluation of Values**

Omar Bin Salamah

## **Abstract**

One of Nietzsche's main projects was to critique morality and to invite a revaluation of our values. Neither secular nor religious interpretations of Nietzsche's critique of morality do it justice. Each support their own interpretation by appealing to certain aspects of his writings. The former appeal to Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity and Christian morality; while the latter appeal to Nietzsche's anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian remarks. In actuality, Nietzsche was neither of the two: he argued that Western secular moralities are a modern manifestation of Christian morality, and that Christian morality is a manifestation of what he comes to call "Slave Morality." On this account, this thesis is a humble attempt to bring forth a philosophical interpretation of Nietzsche's critique and historical analysis of morality, and how we can incorporate his critique and revaluation of values into our lives so we can live a better life. I hope that my contribution will be a meaningful addition to the ongoing philosophical discussion on Nietzsche. I also hope that this thesis will be accessible to those who have not yet introduced themselves to the work of Nietzsche.

## **Acknowledgement**

Writing this thesis has been by far the most engaging task I have worked on since I began my undergraduate degree. I am thankful to my parents who encouraged me all throughout my time as a student at the University of Iowa.

I am thankful beyond expressions to my advisor, Professor David Cuning, who has been a tremendous help in this project. Professor Cuning is an exemplar of what students appreciate in a teacher and a mentor.

I am thankful to Professor Katarina Perovic, Professor Gregory Landini, Professor Ali Hasan, Professor Jovana Davidovic, Professor Carrie Swanson, and Professor Richard Fumerton. Without them, I would not have been a student of Philosophy. Being a student of Philosophy at the University of Iowa taught me useful and long-lasting skills; including the ability to read, analyze and engage with philosophical text. The ability to engage with philosophical text is a skill which I am, without a doubt, extremely grateful to have acquired.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Will to Power .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Pleasure .....</i>	<i>6</i>
<b>Genealogy – The Creation of Master Morality .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Genealogy – The Creation of Slave Morality .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Genealogy – Turning Bad into Evil.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Free Will – Doer vs Deed.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>On the Side of a Punishing God.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>God based Morality – Nietzsche’s account.....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Intrinsic Value – Euthyphro’s Dilemma.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Objective Moral Facts – J.L. Mackie.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>The Christianity of Modern Secular Morality .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Creation of Values – Nietzschean Dialogue .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Characteristics of Higher Humans.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Conclusion – Our Conscience .....</b>	<b>45</b>

## Introduction

One thing that any reader of Nietzsche identifies is his constant critique of morality all throughout his work. Brian Leiter, an American philosopher and a prominent scholar of Nietzsche, wrote that “Nietzsche’s overriding concern is what he comes to call the revaluation of values or the critique of morality.”<sup>1</sup> According to Nietzsche, the unchallenged cultural dominance of morality hinders the growth of the individual and of society in general. Some people become too dogmatic about their moral beliefs; they hold moral values that are passed down from their ancestors without necessarily questioning them. For this reason, Nietzsche declared his project of critiquing moral values:

Let us speak out this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values is for the first time to be called into question*—and for this purpose a knowledge is necessary of the conditions and circumstances out of which these values grew, and under which they experienced their evolution and their distortion (morality as a result, as a symptom, as a mask, as tartuffism, as disease, as a misunderstanding; but also morality as a cause, as a remedy, as a stimulant, as a fetter, as a drug), especially as such a knowledge has neither existed up to the present time nor is even now generally desired . . . [What if] morality itself were to blame if man, as species, never reached his highest potential power and splendor? Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, Preface 6

Much of Nietzsche’s work places great emphasis on the dynamics of overcoming in the sense of exceeding the constrictions and outer boundaries of our dominant patterns of living, perceiving, and especially valuing. Many of the values of our morality which have been passed to us from our ancestors have been taken by us as a given. Some of us, for example, place great significance on abstinence because our morality is influenced by the notion of “sin,” and the feelings of guilt and bad conscience; in turn we might place unhealthy restrictions on our ourselves—both physically and mentally—so that we do not become sinners. Other people live their lives under the belief that

---

<sup>1</sup>Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, Nietzsche’s project: the revaluation of values, pp. 26.

life is short, temporary, unworthy, and what we should be excited about is what comes in the afterlife; in turn they might sublimate their earthly impulses and natural instincts.

Such sentiments are generally valued along with other ascetic values. There is nothing wrong with being ascetic per se<sup>2</sup>; it is only when asceticism is aimed at renouncing earthly pleasures and casting them as unworthy of our attention that it becomes subject to Nietzsche's critique.<sup>3</sup> Asceticism then – particularly that which is disguised as a religious virtue – belongs to Nietzsche's project of reevaluating values. Moreover, asceticism becomes an issue in Nietzsche's account not only when it is disguised as a religious virtue, but also when it goes against one's will to power.<sup>4</sup> While Nietzsche denounces Christianity, his critique is not necessarily a denunciation of the religion unconditionally. For instance, Nietzsche encourages us to criticize and be against Nazism unconditionally and regard it as a bad ideology regardless of when it occurred or where it occurred. In fact, Nietzsche is clearly against Anti-Semitism: in *Beyond Good and Evil* he proposes that we should “banish the anti-Semitic bawlers out of the country.”<sup>5</sup> His critique of Christianity, however, is not unconditional; it is only against certain historical moments in which it occurred.<sup>6</sup>

Nietzsche believes that when we leave our morality unexamined and accept values as a given, we may not be able to advance our lives and reach our highest splendor. Maudemarie Clark, “who has done the most to illuminate the evolution of Nietzsche's philosophical views,” argued that “[Nietzsche's] ultimate problem with morality [is not] that it does not give us good reasons but, ... that it stands in the way of a kind of human perfection.”<sup>7</sup> A Nietzschean solution would be

---

<sup>2</sup> In *The Will to Power* Nietzsche approves of certain forms of asceticism; he writes “I also want to make asceticism natural again: ... in the most spiritual real.” 915.

<sup>3</sup> In *Genealogy of Morality* III 8 Nietzsche describes how the ascetic ideal becomes an instrument for the priests to preach values such as poverty, humility and chastity.

<sup>4</sup> The Will to Power will be discussed at greater length in the first section.

<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, VII 251.

<sup>6</sup> In *Oxford Readings in Philosophy, Nietzsche*, Ken Gemes writes that Nietzsche's assessment of Christianity “is not universal over time, nor indeed is it even universal over all people of a given time. At the particular historical point of time where Nietzsche finds himself, he sees certain notions as being threatening for certain types of individuals.

<sup>7</sup> Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, what are “Genealogy” and the Genealogy, pp. 183.



to start by inviting a critique of our values and a revaluation of our moral system in order to create a better, healthier, and life-affirming system of morality. Through careful revaluation of our values, we can then replace the values which go against our instincts with healthy values that are based on human authority.

In order to accomplish such a task, we must first revisit Nietzsche's genealogy of morality. Nietzsche argued that Christian morality is a modern manifestation of "slave morality." Slave morality is an ancient morality that developed as a reaction to "noble morality." Nietzsche also argues that while the belief in the Christian God has been on the decline, it does not mean that the morality Christianity brought is no longer the dominant one:

God 'the Father' has been thoroughly refuted...[yet] [i]t seems to me that the religious instinct is indeed growing vigorously—but that it rejects any specifically theistic gratification with profound distrust. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 53

My goal in this thesis is to present a discussion on Nietzsche's notion of *the will to power*, a topic which is at the center of Nietzsche's project of critiquing morality. Then, I discuss Nietzsche's historical analysis of the development of what Nietzsche comes to call "slave morality" and "master morality." Once I have laid out Nietzsche's historical analysis of morality, I will argue that Christian morality is a modern manifestation of slave morality. In the same way, I will argue that some modern secular moralities, especially the one's which are based on Utilitarianism, are still "Christian to the core."<sup>8</sup> It would be pleasant if one could create a Nietzschean formula on how we can reevaluate our own values without needing to revisit his historical analysis of morality. However, any attempt to do such thing without first examining the historical aspect of morality and how it relates to modern moralities is bound to misunderstand Nietzsche.

---

<sup>8</sup> Brian Leiter, *THE DEATH OF GOD AND THE DEATH OF MORALITY*.

## The Will to Power

Nietzsche frequently presents new concepts by ways of comparison to ideas of other philosophers. The first chapter of *Beyond Good and Evil*, for example, is titled “On the Prejudice of Philosophers.” With regards to the concept of the will to power, Nietzsche also frequently discusses it by comparing it to Schopenhauer’s notion of the *will to life*. Because of this, I decided to follow the same structure and present the will to power by comparing it and contrasting it with Schopenhauer’s notion of the *will to life*.

Schopenhauer, who Nietzsche considered to be his great teacher<sup>9</sup>, considered that the main driving force in humans is what he comes to call the will to live. Life is suffering because life is a constant state of willing, according to Schopenhauer.<sup>10</sup> Suffering can take different forms and it is not necessarily always followed by happiness; whereas happiness is only a temporary cessation of some particular suffering. Ultimately, “life ... is short, fleeting, and uncertain ... life is so full of troubles and vexations, that one must either rise above it by means of corrected thoughts, or leave it.”<sup>11</sup> For Schopenhauer, all visible tangible phenomena are merely subjective,<sup>12</sup> he even goes so far as to argue that we subjectively add space and time to the world, just like, for example, when we put on a Virtual Reality Headset – we do not interact with what we perceive through the headset directly. When we wear a VR headset, we add a layer of ‘visual reality’ to our experience: this is Schopenhauer’s notion of reality, a layer through which we indirectly experience the world. Consequently, for Schopenhauer, we are incapable of directly observing reality without a layer of experience which mediates between us and the world. That we cannot experience reality in a direct manner is originally a Kantian notion.<sup>13</sup> For Schopenhauer, who was greatly influenced by Kant,

---

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, Preface 5.

<sup>10</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, Vol I*, pp. 400.

<sup>11</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, Vol I*, pp. 131.

<sup>12</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea, Vol I*, pp. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction, pp. 41.

we can only experience through all visible tangible phenomena which, he claims, are merely subjective. According to him, a substantial part of our experience of the world is that of our languishing expression of will and how it filters onto all that we encounter.

Kant believed that we can rationally base our moral decisions on something like a moral law: “Laws which are imperatives, that is, *objective laws of freedom*, which tell us *what ought to happen*—although perhaps it never does happen—therein differing from *laws of nature*, which relate only to *that which happen*. These laws are therefore to be entitled practical laws.”<sup>14</sup> Through our capacity of reason, we can logically agree on a “Universal Law” – a moral principle binding on everyone, everywhere and all the time. Schopenhauer rejects this position by proposing that the universe is not a rational place and argues that the best way for us to live a moral life and to deal with the constant suffering is to be compassionate. Compassion, as opposed to reason, or God given commandments, is the real basis of morality. In fact, Schopenhauer believed that it would be better not to live at all since life itself consists of endless suffering through the pursuit of goals which only bring us temporary pleasure. But given the tragic reality that we are alive—and that the will is always going to be operative in a person’s struggle for existence and self-preservation—we have a moral obligation not to make the suffering of life worse for ourselves and everyone else. This can be achieved by valuing compassion above all things; patience and tolerance towards other fellow-suffering beings. So, a Schopenhauerian approach to life would be to aim primarily at minimizing the suffering of life and to be compassionate towards other fellow suffering humans.

This is where Nietzsche departs from Schopenhauer’s notion of the will: namely drawing away from the unhealthy denial of life; and rejecting the notion that the will is ultimately aimed at self-preservation. The will for Nietzsche is “primitive form of affect, that all other affects are only

---

<sup>14</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason, The Canon of Pure Reason*, I pp. 634.

developments of it.”<sup>15</sup> Contrary to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche came to view “questionable and terrifying things” as a “symptom of strength.”<sup>16</sup> Both agree that there is a “will” that underlies all existence, but for Nietzsche, it is “not merely conservation of energy, but maximal economy in use, so the only reality is the will to grow stronger of every center of force—not self-preservation.”<sup>17</sup> While the will to power can manifest itself through violent behavior and physical domination over others, Nietzsche is more interested in the sublimated kind of will to power, where one can turn his will inwardly and aim at self-mastery instead of mastery over others. Additionally, an important feature of the will to power is that it does not strive for pleasure, “but pleasure supervenes when that which is being striven for is attained; pleasure is an accompaniment, pleasure is not the motive.”<sup>18</sup>

## Pleasure

Nietzsche’s notion of pleasure is related Schopenhauer’s notion, but different in some respects. For Schopenhauer, pleasure is that which we temporarily feel when we satisfy a desire that we have (i.e. satisfying hunger with food), whereas for Nietzsche, pleasure lies precisely “in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance.” In other words, pleasure is a side effect of the will to power. For example, when I run a marathon – a difficult and physically demanding activity – I am resisted by my physical limitation and mental desire to rest instead of continuing the marathon. But if I keep pushing, I feel pleasure every time I progress further towards the end of the marathon. I could choose to quit at any moment in order to end the displeasure caused by the shortness of breath and tiredness of muscles, but if I did, I would not

---

<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 366.

<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 450.

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 367.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

feel the amount of pleasure I would get if I kept going till the finish line. In this case, “one could perhaps describe pleasure in general as a rhythm of little unpleasurable stimuli.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, the greater the discomfort one experiences, the more difficult the activity, the more pleasure one feels by resisting it.

Displeasure therefore is not something which one should exclusively aim at minimizing; instead, one “is rather in continual need for it; every victory, every feeling of pleasure, every event, presupposes a resistance overcome.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, for Nietzsche, pleasure is something which one gets when the will to power is striving against something that resists. The will to power is the ability to adapt discipline and responsibility and pursue goals which challenge oneself into becoming what one sees as a better version of oneself. Nietzsche writes,

What is good? – Everything that enhances people’s feeling of power, will to power, power itself. What is bad? – Everything stemming from weakness. What is happiness? – The feeling that power is *growing*, that some resistance has been overcome. *The Antichrist*, Preface 2

In this way, the will to power is about expression not about possession: that is, it is not about dominating and gaining power over other people. The will to power is the feeling one gets when “some resistance has been overcome.” When one is striving to satisfy one’s will to power, one is inadvertently bound to feel pleasure. On the other hand, “whenever the will to power falls off in any way, there will also be physical decline, decadence.”<sup>21</sup> Whether a person has an aim in life or not, their will to power, according to Nietzsche, is innate – always operating. How one should utilize their will to power depends on one’s aim, meaning, or goal in life.

## Genealogy – The Creation of Master Morality

---

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 697.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 347.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, Preface 17.

Given that the will to power is the ultimate driving force in humans, Nietzsche provides the basis of how it has been exercised throughout history. Specifically, in *The Genealogy of Morality* he embarks in an in-depth analysis of the historical evolution of morality and explicitly calls for a critique and a revaluation of values: “We need a critique of moral values, the value of these values should itself, for once, be examined.”<sup>22</sup> Precisely, Nietzsche invites this critique because as he notes, it “for once” needs to be undertaken<sup>23</sup> and as a point of departure from Schopenhauer’s claim that compassion is the proper basis of morality.<sup>24</sup>

In *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche describe how our system of values has gone through stages of transitions: ‘Good’ and ‘Bad’ did not always refer to the same things they do now. Our contemporary understandings of morality developed from an earlier distinction between the “Good” and the “Bad,” rooted in aristocratic values. The two moralities Nietzsche describes are referred to as “Master Morality” and “Slave Morality”; sometimes he uses the two phrases interchangeably with “Noble Morality,” and “Herd Morality.” ‘Good’ in master morality was not a reference unegoistic acts of kindness. Instead, the aristocrats considered ‘*the good*’ to be a reference to “the noble, the mighty, the high-placed and high-minded, who saw and judged themselves and their actions as good”; whereas ‘bad’ in master morality was a reference to the “lowly, low-minded, common and plebian.”<sup>25</sup> The masters’ way of valuing did not depend on whether something is useful; instead, whatever elevated them, whatever increased their wealth, strength, nobility, etc. was valued by them. Contrarily, the slaves were passive and reactive.

The characteristics of both the masters and the slaves, to a certain extent, are influenced by their parents and ancestors: “It is quite impossible for a man *not* to have the qualities and

---

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Preface 6.

<sup>23</sup> For reasons which I shall discuss later in this essay after I lay out Nietzsche’s historical take on morality.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, Preface 5.

<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, I 2.

predilections of his parents and ancestors in his constitution.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the masters constituted a minority whereas the slaves were the majority.<sup>27</sup> In turn, the definitions the slaves ascribe to words such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ were more popular and used more often among society members. Take for instance the development of language: Nietzsche believes that it developed as a means to express what individuals share in common and to be able to understand one another. For instance, in the *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche provides a historical analysis of language used by slave morality where for instance, the word ‘poor’ became synonymous with ‘saint’ and ‘friend.’<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in the introduction of *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche traces the roots of the word ‘truthful,’ one of the terms the masters use to refer to themselves: “For example, [the masters] call themselves ‘the truthful’: led by the Greek aristocracy ... The word used specifically for this purpose, ἀλήθεια, means, according to its root, one who *is*, who has reality, who really exists and is true.” Here, Nietzsche the philologist<sup>29</sup> is arguing how the masters viewed ‘truth’ not as knowledge that can be discovered or attained (for instance, truth about the metaphysical world); instead, it was “assimilated with the sense of ‘aristocratic’, in contrast to the *deceitful* common man.” Even truth for the masters was related to the aristocratic way of living since they are primarily concerned with what elevates them.<sup>30</sup>

Masters, essentially a reference to the aristocratic noble society, are the beings that elevate man in Nietzsche’s account: “Every elevation of the type ‘man,’ has hitherto been the work of an aristocratic society.”<sup>31</sup> In the *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche states that masters are value creators based on their own authority and criterion: “The noble type of man feels *himself* to be the

---

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX 264.

<sup>27</sup> This is an empirical claim that in every society, the aristocrats are always a minority.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, V 195.

<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche is also a classical philologist, which is another reason why he’s interested in looking at problems from a historical perspective.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, I 5.

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX 257.

determiner of values, he does not need to find approval, in his opinion, ‘What harms me is harmful as such’, he knows that he himself is the one to first confer honor on a thing, he *creates values*.’<sup>32</sup> In its essence, master morality is recognizing that one can measure the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ on her own. Driven by the will to power, a master is one who expresses and actualize his desires to overcome whatever is resisting him to be a noble person. According to Nietzsche, subscribers to master morality are beings who do not answer to anyone. Since they do not answer to anyone, whatever they want to happen does happen. In other words, they assert themselves and dictate what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ based on their evaluation of what is ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ The will to power in the masters can be practiced without interference from those who are outside of the particular class of masters. However, as it is observable in most societies, the aristocrats are always a small group of people (i.e., the minority). Masters, given that they are solitary and independent, are creator of their own values: “... it is the peculiar *right of masters* to create values.”<sup>33</sup> In master morality, the concept of ‘good,’ as I noted in the beginning of this section, was not introduced as a label for unselfish acts (i.e. un-egotistical acts), but rather as a label which distinguishes the noble from the ones whom the nobles considered inferior. It is later that ‘good’ developed into un-egotistical acts of kindness. And similarly, ‘bad’ was a reference to the distinguishing feature of the lower common class (i.e. the slaves).

## Genealogy – The Creation of Slave Morality

Slave morality is a reaction to master morality. Essentially, the slaves are subordinates of the oppressive masters. In the first essay of *The Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche illustrates how persists played a role in the dynamics of the two moralities. Priests, according to Nietzsche, lack

---

<sup>32</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, 260.

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX 261.



the characteristics of the nobles: they are not as powerful, not as strong, but they are more intelligent, and they revolted against master morality.<sup>34</sup> Out of their powerlessness, “their hate sells into something huge and uncanny to a most intellectual poisonous level.”<sup>35</sup> The slaves and the priests, due to their lack of power, and out of *ressentiment*,<sup>36</sup> began inverting the values of the nobles. In turn, the ‘good’—which in master morality was a reference to distinguish the noble from the ones whom the nobles considered inferior—became a reference to the suffering, the deprived, the sick, the ugly – those were “the only pious people ... salvation is for them alone.”

What comes out of the *ressentiment* of the slaves and the priests is a different form of valuation, one which operates against the master’s form of valuation. Due to and by virtue of the slaves’ weakness and oppression, they are unable to live their life in an affirmative way: they are unable to assert themselves and dictate what they take to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ based on their own evaluation – there needs to be someone whom they compare themselves to in order to judge themselves as ‘good.’ The *ressentiment* of the slaves turned creative enough so it developed a negative and reactive sentiment against the masters and their way of living. The slaves’ unpleasant *reactive* attitude to the masters is brought about by a frustration and inability to handle the suffering, and to externalize their suffering, thereby attributing it to the masters. Essentially, the slaves’ revolt in morality serves as a means to cope with the suffering, to view themselves as ‘good,’ and as a way to invert the values of the masters since the slaves lack the characteristics of the masters. This is similar to Schopenhauer’s morality of compassion since slave morality, according to Nietzsche, is motivated by the need to cope with suffering, which is a result of the slaves’ weakness and their

---

<sup>34</sup> Section 195 of *Beyond Good and Evil* is Nietzsche’s first discussion of the slave revolt in morality.

<sup>35</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, I 7.

<sup>36</sup> In *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Morality*, Brian Leiter defines *ressentiment* a “feeling that arises in response or as a reaction to some state of affairs ... It must be a state of affairs that is both *unpleasant* to the affected person and one which he is powerless to alter through physical action.”

will to power being regularly thwarted. Due to the slaves' weakness and need to cope with the suffering, they aim at establishing a sense of community where "the individual's dissatisfaction with himself is overridden by his delight at the prosperity of the community."<sup>37</sup> In its essence, "herd organization [is] the awakening of the communal feeling of power" which is in accordance with Nietzsche's account that the will to power "is the primitive form of affect [which] all other affects are only developments of it."<sup>38</sup>

As a result, 'good' from the slave perspective referred to their characteristics and ways of living. Poverty, humbleness, weakness, forgiveness, neighborly-love and "turning the other cheek" were some of the 'good' values in slave morality. In addition, in slave morality the slaves benefited from the unegoistic actions of one another, such as turning the other cheek, so they referred to the actions which bring benefit to one another as 'good.' As a result, usefulness, helpfulness, and 'goodness' were considered the same thing in slave morality: "unegoistic acts were praised and called good by their recipients, in other words, by the people whom they were useful; later, everyone forgot the origin of the praise and because such acts had always been *habitually* praised as good, people also began to experience them as good – as if they were something good *as such*."<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche notes that we have forgotten such association, therefore ultimately considering usefulness as identical to 'goodness.' Over time, the convention of mixing up the two has led the slaves to consider themselves to be good by virtue of being a slave since a slave is forgiving, humble, and weak and the slaves consider these characteristics to be 'good.'<sup>40</sup>

Having self-control is another characteristic which the slaves praise in slave morality: slaves do not assert themselves and cannot live the way the masters do, so self-control becomes an

---

<sup>37</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, III 9.

<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 366.

<sup>39</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, I 2.

<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, V 190.

important element for the slaves – it operates not necessarily for the sake of discipline, but more as a necessary mean to survival. Since the masters are the aristocratic class, they had more control in society, so when the slaves act in a way that dissatisfies the masters, the slaves are putting themselves in a dangerous position – so it was better for the slaves to have self-control, to be careful about how much they can discharge their natural impulses. Slave morality is concerned with how to live in a way that would create the least problems for the slaves since they are incapable of confronting or competing with the masters. In general, asserting oneself is not valued highly because such behavior could lead the slave into trouble. The master is viewed by the slave as someone who lacks traits such as self-control, abstinence, cleverness, deviousness, who have not learned to internally disrespect what externally they might go along with.

The slaves suffer from a society which they come to view as oppressive and unequal. They are envious of those who lead a life that is less painful. They are frustrated with not being able to do anything about the suffering. As a mechanism of coping, the slaves revolted against master morality by creating new values, a new way of valuing, and making moral claims where weakness is virtue and strength is vice. The revolt in morality specifically “occurs when resentment itself turns creative and gives birth to values: the resentment of those beings who, denied the proper response of action, compensate for it only with imaginary revenge.” More importantly, the slave does not value anything by internally judging whether it is ‘good’ or ‘bad’; instead, as a “feature of resentment: in order to come about, slave morality first has to have an opposing, external world, it needs, psychologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all, – its action is basically a reaction.”<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, I 10.

## Genealogy – Turning Bad into Evil

Nietzsche argues that the slaves' resentment, envy, and hatred of the masters eventually becomes strong enough to give 'good' and 'bad' a whole new meaning: 'bad' turns into 'evil' and becomes a reference to the masters who are stronger (both mentally and physically) and more capable of exercising their will to power with no fear of external circumstances. The difference between 'bad' and 'evil' in Nietzsche's discussion of the two moralities is essentially that 'bad,' in master morality, is a reference to that which is weak, lowly, poor and un-noble; whereas 'evil' in master morality is *not* a way of valuing: the masters' way of valuing did not involve the judgement that something is 'evil', but only either 'good' or 'bad.' The binary value judgement 'good' and 'bad' are the master's way of valuing, it is a characterization of morality by valuing and celebrating aristocratic values such as power and nobility being 'good' and weakness and ignobility being 'bad.' When the slaves revolted against the masters' form of valuation, a new form of valuation came about: unlike the masters who judge things to either be 'good' or 'bad,' the slaves judge things to be either 'good' or 'evil.' In the masters' way of valuing, a master is judged as being 'good' because he is noble, an action is judged as being 'good' because it expresses the master's power; whereas in the slaves' way of valuing (after the slave revolt), a slave is judged as being 'good' because he is not like the oppressive and 'evil' master. In slave morality, an action is judged as being 'good' because it relates to the slave's way of living (e.g., being humble and forgiving is 'good'). Nietzsche illustrates this notion in the first essay of the *Genealogy of Morality*, he writes: "In contrast [to the masters], picture 'the enemy' as the man of ressentiment conceives him...'*the Evil One*,' and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he then evolves as an afterthought and pendant, a 'good one' -- himself!"<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Nietzsche argues that an 'evil' act is an act that is 'bad' and that is seen, by the slaves, as having been done freely, where there can

---

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, I 10.

be blame and punishment against the perpetrator (i.e., the master). Consequently, slave morality devalued that which the master values and the slave does not have. For instance, the master is strong and wealthy, so the slave vilified the oppressor and devalued strength and wealth. This is an entirely opposite way of valuing from the masters' way. The masters see themselves as 'good' without question, therefore, they come to view whatever is not them as 'bad', not 'evil.' 'Good' and 'evil,' as Nietzsche notes, is the position of the slaves, where 'evil' is that which the master does freely which is worthy of blame and punishment. The slaves' way of deciding that an action is 'evil' is dependent on their belief that the action was done freely and that it is worthy of punishment.

Christianity, Nietzsche argues, is in its essence slave morality – that is why he argues that priests played an important role in slave morality. Various verses in the Bible offer supporting examples to Nietzsche's account on how the slave's way of evaluating what is good is dependent on appealing to what the master does. For instance, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Mark 10:25) In other words, wealth, something which the masters possess, is not something good or something that should be desired.<sup>43</sup> Further, what the slave does is also tied to a promise from God: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) This praising of values that belong to slave morality strengthened the slave's opinion of their place in society. Now 'our' morality is not only 'good' because it contradicts the 'evil' masters, but it is also legitimate because it is supported by God – its authority is a Divine God. In this way, the slaves' beliefs and moralities become dependent on what the priest preaches, and the preacher claims a connection to God and what he dictates to be 'good' and 'bad.' Thus, the slaves' morality and way of valuing is motivated by the

---

<sup>43</sup> Other interpretation of this verse claim that it is harder for the rich to enter 'the kingdom of God,' because 1) the rich has to justify how they acquired their wealth (i.e. ethical acquisition of wealth), and 2) justify where their money was spent – whether it was spent on things which cause suffering to others for example.

fact that there is a Divine being – He is the dictator of morality. Essentially, the externalization of the authority of morality—specifically to the Christian God—played an extremely significant role in shaping slave morality.

There are two important claims which need to be justified. First, my claim that the slaves needed to externalize the authority of their morality. Second, my claim that specifically the Christian God played an important role in slave morality. The simple answer to both is to say given that slaves' morality was a reaction to master morality and given that the slaves are incapable of asserting themselves in the world, they needed a way to express their power. So, given that Nietzsche is specifically discussing the slaves who were located close (distance wise) to where Christianity was birthed, Christianity and the Christian God were the best available option for the slaves to express their power and to feel a sense of support: "[Christianity ] offered innumerable people some support." While this claim is supported by Nietzsche,<sup>44</sup> it does not provide sufficient evidence to my claim that the slaves specifically needed the Christian God as an authority, for the slaves could have created their own morality of resentment, or they could have adapted a different religion such as Buddhism for example. To regard my claim as a reasonable explanation, I will provide two reasons of why the slaves needed the Christian God in specific as an authority.

First, Buddhism is not compatible with the slaves' generalized notion that there is a Divine commander whose commands and whose moral order everyone must follow unconditionally:

What does 'moral world order' mean? That there is a will of God – once and for all – relating to what human beings do and do not do; that the value of people, of an individual, can be measured by how much or how little each one obeys the will of God ... which is to say it punishes and rewards depending on the degree of obedience. *The Antichrist*, 26

In this 'moral world order', there is no expectation on the slave to decide whether an action is 'good' and 'bad' for himself, to be assertive, or be like the masters who do not fear confrontation;

---

<sup>44</sup> See *Genealogy of Morality*, I 16, *Beyond Good and Evil*, III 48, *The Antichrist*, 58.

instead, the “do and do not do” are provided by God, all that the slave needs to do is obey God, and the more he obeys, the more ‘worthy’ he becomes.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, given that a slave is not capable of asserting himself, of standing up to the noble, the slave had to look for a source of power somewhere else: “One sets up the opponent of one’s ideal as the opponent of God; one fabricates for oneself the right to great pathos, to *power*, to curse and bless.”<sup>46</sup> So, for instance, instead for the slave to confront the oppressive master, the slave characterized the tension between himself and the master as being a tension between the ‘disobedient’ master and the almighty God, and whoever disobeys God is ‘evil’. It would not have been compatible for the slaves to be ‘on the side of God’ had they adapted Buddhism since Buddhism does not promise a powerful God on the side of the oppressed (i.e., the slave). Nietzsche explicitly states that when one lacks power and is unable to stand up and “gain authority over those who possess physical strength and authority,” one invokes “the belief that they have in their hands a higher, mightier strength—*God*.”<sup>47</sup> In this way, the belief in a powerful God fills the lack of power on the part of the slaves.

Second, externalizing the source of morality to God was essential in bringing tremendous utility to the priests whom the slaves depended on; it operated as an instrument of power and control in the hands of the priest. This is expressed most clearly and explicitly in section 26 of *The Antichrist*:

The priest -, abuses the name of God: he gives the name 'kingdom of God' to a state of affairs where the priests determine the value of things; he gives the name 'will of God' to the means used to reach or maintain this state; he ... measures peoples, ages, and individuals according to whether they promote or oppose the domination of the priests ... the priests simplified the psychology of every great event into the idiotic formula 'obedience or disobedience to God'. - Advancing to the next stage: the 'will of God', which is to say: the conditions for maintaining power in the hands of the priests, needs to be divulged, - this call for a 'revelation'. In simple terms: an enormous literary falsification is needed. *The Antichrist*, I 26

---

<sup>45</sup> Similar notion is provided in *The Will to Power*, pp. 510.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 204.

<sup>47</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 89.

It operated as a political tool in the hands of the priests in order to control the masses. In order to be ‘good,’ in slave morality, one has to obey God; and in order to obey God, one has to know what God wants through the priestly channel. It was the priest’s objective “to have it understood that he counts as the highest type of man,” not only that, but also “that he rules—even over those who wield power.” More importantly, the priest wanted it to be understood “that he is indispensable, unassailable” to the point that he “absolutely not to be replaced or undervalued.”<sup>48</sup> The priests were able to reach the position of being important in slave morality by convincing the herd that “there is no other source of the good than the priests,” and “that there is no other, no direct access to God.”<sup>49</sup> One of the significant consequences that resulted from the priests holding a powerful position in slave morality is that *truth* became “identical with the teachings of the priests.”<sup>50</sup>

Ultimately, Nietzsche does not criticize slave morality because those who subscribe to it do not possess characteristics such as self-assertion. Instead, he criticizes it because it aims at devaluing and suppressing our natural instincts (i.e., it is better to be humble, weak, and poor than proud, strong, and rich); and because those who do not assert themselves and are in a position of weakness are bound to develop resentment towards those who are able to freely assert themselves. Therefore, Nietzsche sees slave morality as a way of life which is geared to a lack of perturbation, a way of easily getting through, a way to avoid any kind of confrontation or assertive negotiation that would require challenging the masters, a way of satisfying a sense of self-esteem without any external challenging, and most importantly, a way for the slaves to express their power since they believe they are on the side of a powerful God.

---

<sup>48</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 88.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 91.



## Free Will – Doer vs Deed

Much of these negative and life-negating characteristics that slave morality poses are, to some extent, a result of a false understanding of the relation between the *doer* and the *deed*. This misunderstanding is another factor that helped the slaves to view masters as ‘evil’ for the slaves believe that the masters could (meaning they had a choice to) act in a different way. Nietzsche writes that “there is no ‘being’ behind the deed, its effect and what becomes of it; ‘the doer’ is invented as an afterthought, — the doing is everything.”<sup>51</sup> He invites us to think of slave and master morality by reference to lambs and birds of prey. The lambs may resent a bird of prey for hunting and killing and judge them to be ‘evil.’ However, such judgement according to Nietzsche is meaningless because lambs do not avoid killing by virtue of a moral standard, instead they are simply unable to kill. If we judge the bird of prey for killing, it is a result of our thinking that the doer is separated from the deed, that the bird of prey has the ability to control its impulse to hunt and kill. But for Nietzsche, such thinking is a linguistic error since there is no such thing as a doer, only deeds. Nietzsche is not implying that violent people should be left to their own devices; instead, it is that the slaves in slave morality are deceiving themselves into believing that they are, in fact, capable of acting the way the masters do, but are refraining from doing so because they are ‘good’ people: “‘Let us be different from evil people, let us be good! And a good person is anyone who does not harm anyone’ ... this means, if heard coolly and impartially, nothing more than: ‘We weak people are just weak; it is good to do nothing for which we are not strong enough’”<sup>52</sup>

For Nietzsche, different people have varying levels of strength, intellect, passion, endurance, etc. The issue is when people attempt to generalize a moral standard and assume that what works for them *ought* to work for everyone else. Both the weak and the strong (i.e., master

---

<sup>51</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, I 13

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

and slave) are driven by the will to power, so the desire to be strong is natural in both of them. Since the weak are also driven by the will to power, but they are not strong enough to actualize their will to power, they accommodate for the inability to express their will to power by believing that their lack of strength is a free choice instead of something to which they are doomed. So, the ones who are lacking characteristics such as strength cast a moral judgement on the strong. It is a self-deceptive way for the weak to view himself as better than the ‘tyrannical’ strong. This essentially is Nietzsche’s problem with the concept of doer and deed, particularly with slave morality since it detaches the subject from the predicate. The subject becomes one’s “soul” which in turn becomes *subject* to moral judgement.

This account of agency which separates the doer from the deed is one which Nietzsche saw as a *dogmatic* account, one which was taken for granted as the “right answer.”<sup>53</sup> Given his strong skepticism of *all* dogmatic beliefs, Nietzsche here is opposed to taking the doer-deed account to be some kind of a “final answer.” One way to attack dogmatic accounts of agency is through critique, another way is to provide a strong alternative account. But Nietzsche’s ‘alternative account’ is not an attempt to replace one dogma with another, nor is it an attempt to *fully* explain the notion agency. In fact, he invites further critique and inquiry into his notion of agency: “the way is open for new versions and refinement of the soul-hypothesis; and such conceptions as ‘mortal soul,’ and ‘soul subjective multiplicity,’ and ‘soul as social structure of the drives and affects,’ which henceforth to have citizens’ rights in science.”<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche saw the doer and deed

---

<sup>53</sup> Even in our present day, this is still a common account of agency. Peter Singer for instance argues that “Becoming a vegetarian is a highly practical and effective step one can take toward ending both the killing of nonhuman animals and the infliction of suffering upon them.” Brian Leiter argues that the “basic moral outlook” of Peter Singer “is Christian to its core, as any Nietzschean would notice.” (*THE DEATH OF GOD AND THE DEATH OF MORALITY*, pp. 1).

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, I 12.

notion of agency as an account which the weak defended very strongly.<sup>55</sup> The belief that the strong had a choice, and is therefore worthy of blame and punishment, Nietzsche argues, is what “engenders hatred, revengefulness, deceitfulness ... while we are far less censorious towards an animal because we regard it as unaccountable.”<sup>56</sup> After all, subscribers of slave morality are still people, which means they have a will to power from the Nietzschean perspective, so this can be thought of as an outlet where the weak deceive themselves into believing that exercising strength is a free choice.

## On the Side of a Punishing God

In the previous sections, I discussed the notion of God primarily to support my claim that He was necessary in slave morality, and that it is specifically the Christian God that was necessary. In this section, I will focus on Nietzsche’s psychological analysis of the role of God as a ‘Punisher’ on the side of the slaves.

Nietzsche argues that the resentful slave does not discharge what frustrates him outwardly, he allows it to build inside him; what is done against him slowly builds as resentful hatred. He contemplates revenge, not by himself against his ‘enemy,’ but instead from the all-powerful God – a powerful being on his side. Neil Sinhababu argues that due to the slave’s unsatisfied desire, and “out of the brewing cauldron of unstained hate,”<sup>57</sup> they have come to wish for revenge (through their “vengeful thinking”) against their masters.<sup>58</sup> This way of thinking “allow the slaves to regard themselves as fully justified in hating the nobles, as one is justified in hating evil people.” It also

---

<sup>55</sup> Weakness in this context is not necessarily physical weakness, but rather weakness of “spirit” as the word spirit is commonly used.

<sup>56</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality, Supplementary material*, I 99.

<sup>57</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, I 11.

<sup>58</sup> Sinhababu, Oxford *Nietzsche and Morality*, Vengeful Thinking and Moral Epistemology, pp. 264.

“plays a key role in explaining why the afterlife will be pleasant for them and terrible for the nobles.”<sup>59</sup>

The concept of the afterlife, particularly when the Judgement Day arrives, is described in an extremely graphical and vivid way by Tertullian in the fifteenth section of the first essay in *The Genealogy of Morality*: “persecutors of the name of the Lord, being liquified by flames fiercer than those with which they themselves regard against Christians.”<sup>60</sup> It is not only vengeful thinking by the slave for revenge, but also, as described by Tertullian, a desire to *watch, observe, and enjoy* the suffering of their enemies. This kind of obsession for painful revenge is rooted deeply in slave morality: even in the afterlife when they are in heaven, they still hold a desire to watch their enemies burn in hell. Primarily, the seeking of revenge in slave morality, while desired by the slaves, is not expressed explicitly as a personal hope, but rather as the “Judgement of God” that will restore justice. It is not far from reasonable that extreme vengeful thinking could lead someone to have such conception of the afterlife. And it is not the case that all Christians have the same conception of the afterlife as Tertullian. However, as Sinhababu notes, this is “a powerful illustration of how vengeful our wishful thinking can lead one into error.”<sup>61</sup> This way of thinking and conceiving the positive and negative aspects of life, as well as the importance of revengeful justice in slave morality, have allowed the slaves to not only believe that the masters are ‘evil’ and therefore by contrast the slaves are ‘good,’ but also to believe that the properties of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ exist in the world.<sup>62</sup> In modern terms, the slaves’ account is what ethicists have come to call “moral realism”: believing that there are “objective” facts about what is ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ and what

---

<sup>59</sup> Sinhababu, Oxford *Nietzsche and Morality*, Vengeful Thinking and Moral Epistemology, pp. 265.

<sup>60</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, I 15. Section 15 of the first essay in *Genealogy of Morality* has a long dark and vivid quote by the early Church Father Tertullian describing the enemies of Christianity suffering and enduring hell when Judgement Day arrives.

<sup>61</sup> Sinhababu, Oxford *Nietzsche and Morality*, Vengeful Thinking and Moral Epistemology, pp. 265.

<sup>62</sup> Sinhababu, Oxford *Nietzsche and Morality*, Vengeful Thinking and Moral Epistemology, pp. 266.

is valuable and invaluable.<sup>63</sup> A key issue in the discussion of the many accounts of metaethics—including moral realism and anti-realism—is the necessity of providing a foundation for moral beliefs, a solid foundation that makes the moral claims true in a clear way.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it is important to understand Nietzsche's position with regards to claims about the objectivity of values.

## God based Morality – Nietzsche's account

It is not uncommon for some people to think that God is the ultimate source of morality and that if God does not exist, then there is no such thing as right or wrong. A person might say: "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted."<sup>65</sup> One way to interpret this is to say that if God does not exist, then all normative beliefs become equal. The belief that anything that God says is more important and worthier of our attention than other beliefs will no longer be uniquely valuable once we no longer believe in God (either through the decline of faith or through fully abandoning religion). In other words, the Christian belief that has oriented many societies for thousands of years will no longer be significant. It will be just as valuable as any other belief.

Often, as it has been noted by Nietzsche scholars, atheists attempt to utilize Nietzsche's writing by arguing that he is an atheist and that his primary goal, stemming from the fact that he is an 'atheist,' is to eliminate religion. Hypothetically, if Nietzsche was motivated from an atheistic point of view, he would not have praised the Greek Gods for example. For him, the Greek Gods played a positive role in culture. The Christians "who saw in suffering a whole, hidden machinery of salvation" were "obliged to invent gods and intermediate beings at every level, in short,

---

<sup>63</sup> Leiter, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Morality, Metaethics: realism about value?* pp. 137.

Nietzsche also argues how it was important for the priests to have the slaves believe that "truth exists," but "there is only one way of attaining it: to become a priest." *The Will to Power*, pp. 88.

<sup>64</sup> This is what is often referred to as the grounding problem in metaethics.

<sup>65</sup> Often this quote is attributed to Fyodor Dostoyevsky supposedly written in *The Brothers Karamazov*, but I could not find any evidence to such claim in the book.

something that ... could see in the dark and which would not miss out on an interesting spectacle of pain so easily.” As a result of the invention of God by Christians, they came to view life as meaningful, as justifying itself and justifying its ‘evil’: “[Christianity] served the advocates of God insofar as it conceded to the world, in spite of suffering and evil, the character of perfection—including “freedom”: evil appeared full of meaning.”<sup>66</sup> The Gods the Greeks invented played an entirely different role than the God of Christianity: “We can be in no doubt: they were intended to be *festivals*.”<sup>67</sup>

However, it is one thing to question the existence of God; and it is another thing to assert that *all* morals, *all* values, are dependent on God. Nietzsche is not interested in providing an argument against the existence of God. When critiquing Christian morality, Nietzsche’s writings focus on the ideal that Christianity portrays—whether the ideal is life-affirming or life-denying for example: “The whole absurd residue of Christian fable, ... and theology does not concern us. It could be a thousand times more absurd and we would not lift a finger against it. But we do combat the ideal.”<sup>68</sup> Instead, he is more interested<sup>69</sup> in psychologically evaluating the effects of the belief that either God is the source of morality, or that morality is independent from God. In fact, for Nietzsche truth and falsity of any religion are not the issue: “If someone were to *prove* this Christian God to us, we would believe in him even less.”<sup>70</sup> Here, it does not make a difference for Nietzsche if the Christian God does actually exist. What matters for him is the values, the way of life, the approach to life that Judeo-Christian morality encourages.

---

<sup>66</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morality*, II 7.

<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 252.

<sup>69</sup> Nietzsche is not against the idea of a God or Gods as a whole. He greatly admires the Greek Gods – Dionysian for instance.

<sup>70</sup> Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, I 47.

Nietzsche critiques and rejects God-based morality (specifically Christian morality) not merely because it claims that its source is Divine, but because of its tendency towards unconditional generalization.<sup>71</sup> For instance, Nietzsche also criticizes utilitarianism for reasons that are similar to his criticism of slave morality,<sup>72</sup> namely the utilitarians insistence that a single set of moral principles is universally applicable. While it can be argued that utilitarianism is a secular moral theory, there can be no doubt that it is an offspring of Judeo-Christian values. John Stuart Mill, a classical utilitarian, explicitly promotes utilitarianism from a Christian point of view:

In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as one would done by, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, II What Utilitarianism Is*

What might work for one person might not work for another: "That which serves the higher class of men for nourishment or refreshment, must also poison to an entirely different and lower order of human beings. The virtue of the common man would perhaps mean vice and weakness in a philosopher."<sup>73</sup> As Ken Gemes notes, it is this tendency towards unconditional generalization, "towards the notion that what is good for one is good for all, that Nietzsche identifies as the heart of all moralities."<sup>74</sup> In turn, for Nietzsche, the unchallenged belief that a unifying single morality works for everyone, all individuals and all groups, becomes a threat on human greatness and human excellence.<sup>75</sup>

In Nietzsche's discussion of the two moralities, we often find that slave/Christian morality always tries to generalize itself unconditionally; it claims that it is applicable to everyone. This claim is fundamentally based on the idea that because it is *the* God given morality, it must be the right one and so it must work for everyone. The values it provides are claimed to be universally

---

<sup>71</sup> "What is fair for one cannot by any means for that reason alone also be fair for others." Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, VII 228

<sup>72</sup> Nietzsche also writes that "slave morality is essentially a morality of utility." *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX 260

<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, II 30.

<sup>74</sup> Gemes, *Nietzsche, Nietzsche's Critique of Truth*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> Leiter, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche on Morality*, Nietzsche's Project: The Revaluation of Values.

good because they are coming from a divine God. As a result of such claims, some people have come to the belief that we all ought to adhere to and follow such morality. This claim however, in the context of slave morality, is two claims fused together.

It is an implicit claim that God *does* exist, and a claim that His morality *is* objective. Each of the two claims can be treated separately, but I will only argue on the second claim given the scope of this paper. As it has been stated earlier in this section, Nietzsche's concern is not about the existence of God; instead, what concerns him (apart from the psychological effects) is the claim that it is an objective morality and because of that, all that comes out of it, all the values that it encapsulates, must not only be good for us, but also morally obligatory for us to follow. The claim that it is (or that there is) an objective morality presupposes that its values are (1) intrinsically valuable, (2) and that there are objective moral facts. In the next two sections, I will argue Nietzsche's position against the claim that moral values are intrinsically valuable, and the claim that there are objective moral facts.

## Intrinsic Value – Euthyphro's Dilemma

In *Euthyphro* by Plato, Socrates engages in a dialogue with Euthyphro, an Athenian judge, in an attempt to demonstrate that Euthyphro's account of morality and the nature of goodness is not firmly grounded. In particular, Socrates' question to Euthyphro where he asks, do good things have the quality of goodness because God loves them, or do they possess the quality of goodness independent from God (i.e., intrinsically)? Another way to view the question is to ask whether an action, for instance, is morally good because God says it is so, or that God recognizes that it is morally good because the action possesses the quality of goodness independent from Him. The relevant segment of the dialogues is the following:



*Socrates:* We shall soon know better whether it is. Consider this: Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods? (10d)<sup>76</sup>

For Socrates, goodness and morality are not dependent on the existence of God. Goodness is a quality that a thing possesses intrinsically. When God does something good, it is not because God had decided that the thing is good; instead, God is acting in a way that meets the standards of morality and goodness, which already exist independently from Him. There is a worry here with Socrates' account: if good and bad are entirely dependent on God, without any standards outside of Him; then, the worry is that morality would be arbitrary if God, an infinitely powerful Being, decided what good and bad are without having any bases of criterion. Euthyphro's view is, in fact, that goodness and morality are dependent on God. Goodness is not an intrinsic value that a thing possesses, instead goodness is something which God bestows on a thing. So, for all X, X is good if and only if God bestows goodness on X. In this view, if a thing is good, it is because God bestowed the quality of goodness on the thing. The dialogue continues, and Socrates points to the circularity in Euthyphro's reasoning:

*Socrates:* But if the god-loved and the pious were the same, my dear Euthyphro, then if the pious was being loved because it was pious, 11 the god-loved would also be being loved because it was god-loved; and if the god-loved was god-loved because it was being loved by the gods, then the pious would also be pious because it was being loved by the gods. But now you see that they are in opposite cases as being altogether different from each other: the one is such as to be loved because it is being loved, the other is being loved because it is such as to be loved. I'm afraid, Euthyphro, that when you were asked what piety is, you did not wish to make its nature clear to me, but you told me an affect or a quality of it, that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the b gods, but you have not yet told me what the pious is. Plato, *Five Dialogues, Euthyphro* (11b)

There is a worry that is present in Euthyphro's account: if goodness and morality are decided by God, then based on what standard, or criteria, does God decide what is good? In other words, suppose God decides to bestow the quality of goodness on Q, on what basis did God decide to bestow goodness on Q, instead of P for example? If God decides that Q is good, then He either

---

<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Five Dialogues, Euthyphro* (G. M. A Grube translation)

made the decision based on a standard, or He made the decision arbitrarily, not based on any standard. If we suppose that His decision is made arbitrarily, not based on any standard, then this would create two problems.

The first problem is that if God decides, based on no standard, to bestow goodness on Q, and Q happens to be murder, so now murdering other people becomes something valuable, then the world would just turn into chaos. It would be very difficult for us to even imagine living in a world where people wake up every day with the belief that murder is good, or even acceptable. However, if God decides, based on no standard, to bestow goodness on Q, and Q happens to be loving one's parents, then this would not cause any problems for us. But in this case, we revisit Nietzsche's genealogical and psychological account: namely, what brought us to the belief that there is a transcendent being Whom the quality of goodness is dependent on? Additionally, why would we need God if His decision that Q is good is based on no standard? If the decision is based on no standard, then we ourselves can figure out what is good from bad. There is also the fact that it is hardly ever, perhaps never the case that someone truly believes in the Abrahamic God and is familiar with the teachings of the Abrahamic religions; but still believes that God decides goodness and badness in an arbitrary and not in a wise manner.

The second and more serious problem is that if God's decision is not made arbitrarily, but instead is made based on a standard, then He either a) created the standard which he uses to decide what is good, or b) the standard already existed and God 'consults' the standard to make His decision. If a), then this would bring us back to the first problem; namely, on what basis (or standard) did God create the standard? If b), then it would seem that there is not a need for God; we ourselves could consult the standard and find out what is good and what is moral.

Nietzsche rejects Socrates' account and partially agrees with Euthyphro's. Like Euthyphro, he rejects the notion that goodness is something that a thing possesses intrinsically: "Whatever has

*value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less.” Instead, whatever has value “has been *given* value at some time, as a present.”<sup>77</sup> This view is similar to Euthyphro’s in the sense that nothing is valuable in-itself, but it is not God who gives value, or bestows goodness, instead, “it was we who gave and bestowed it. Only we have created the world *that concerns man!*”<sup>78</sup> So, for all X, X does not have value in itself until someone assigns value to it. In other words, things become, or things are good because someone assigned value to them. In this way, Nietzsche’s position is not challenged by the Euthyphro dilemma. The dilemma is worrisome when the two choices are either goodness is something which a thing possess intrinsically, or goodness is something which God bestows on a thing, but so far, Nietzsche’s position is neither of the two.<sup>79</sup>

## Objective Moral Facts – J.L. Mackie

Even that sense of truth, which is at bottom merely the sense of security, is possessed by man in common with the animals: we do not wish to be deceived by others or by ourselves; we hear with some suspicion the promptings of our own passions, we control ourselves and remain on the watch against ourselves. Now, the animal does all this as well as man ... In the same way, the animal observes the effects it exercises on the imagination of other beasts: it thus learns to view itself from their position, to consider itself “objectively”. Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, I 26

In my reading of the various interpretations of Nietzsche’s critique of morality, I found that claims about “Truth” are where most disagreements on his interpretation occur. Among the current prominent scholars of Nietzsche, I find Brian Leiter, and Ken Gemes’ interpretation to be the most plausible for they make the best case, the most reasonable interpretations, and they are the most widely recognizable academically. Often, the interpretations which claim that Nietzsche completely rejects truth refer to passages or quotes that are taken out of context. For instance, in

---

<sup>77</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 301.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. Brian Leiter argues that “what seems to have intrinsic value for Nietzsche is human excellence or human greatness.” (*Morality Critics*, pp. 1047) This will be discussed in later sections.

his (Summer 1886 – Fall 1887) Notebooks in an essay titled *On Truth and Lie I an Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche wrote “it is precisely facts that do not exist, only *interpretations*. . . .” However, this is a prime example of taking Nietzsche out of context. This quote, if taken at face value, would mean that Nietzsche completely rejects truth; but that is not the case: Brian Leiter writes that “[Nietzsche does not claim] that there are no truths or facts about anything, let alone truths about value – a reading which has now been widely discredited. There is, on the skeptical view at issue here, a special problem about the objectivity of value.”<sup>80</sup> What Nietzsche rejects—quite consistently with his moral anti-realist view—is the claim that there are objective moral values.<sup>81</sup> The philosopher J.L. Mackie shares a similar view with Nietzsche: namely, both are moral anti-realists. Their rejection is simply against the claim that there are objective moral values. For Mackie, there are two claims he provides to argue against objective moral values. He provides a conceptual claim and a metaphysical claim.

On the metaphysical claim, Mackie argues that the mistake people, make when they make moral judgements, is the assumption that their judgements correspond to objective values (i.e., objective moral facts). He believes that all claims about objective morality are false. The claim is that we believe that we act in accordance to an objective moral code; but in actuality, we do not because in the real world, objective moral facts and duties do not exist. Supposing that his argument is sound, it would mean that our belief does not correspond to anything objective. He believes that there is an error in our thinking when we make a moral judgement about what is moral and what is immoral. These judgements, according to Mackie, do not seem to correspond to

---

<sup>80</sup> Brian Leiter, “Nietzsche’s Moral and Political Philosophy”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)

<sup>81</sup> “Whatever has *value* in our world now does not have value in itself, according to its nature—nature is always value-less.” Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 301.

any facts in the real world since facts that do exist in the real world can be examined empirically, but facts about morality cannot be examined empirically the way natural facts can be.

Through observation and empirical examination, testing and verifying, we were able to discover and prove that, for example, the laws of physics exist. In the event that a person doubts the existence of a law of physics, we are able to prove to them and demonstrate, through the scientific method, that it does exist. If an objective moral code exists in the same way the laws of physics exist, then we should be able to apply some method of testing, some method of verifying. We might say that objective moral values exist, but it is not fair to compare them to the laws of physics. The two are different, and so a comparison is not a fair way to judge whether objective moral values exist or not. Mackie would ask, what are they and how do we know them? They seem to be strange in comparison to everything else we know. This strangeness of moral values is what Mackie calls the “The argument from queerness”:

If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty or moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything. J.L. Mackie, *On The Subjectivity of Values*, 9

Nietzsche too took morals to be something queer – it seems that we are unable to treat them in the same way we treat other things: “All moral acts are in reality “something different,”—we cannot say anything more about them, and all acts are essentially unknown to us.”<sup>82</sup> The common belief, however, does not raise these suspicions; they take moral realism at face value:

The general belief, however, has been and still is quite the contrary: the most ancient realism is against us: up to the present humanity has thought, “An action is what it appears to be.” [Schopenhauer], too ... continued to adhere to this moral realism: “Each one of us is in reality a competent and perfect moral judge, knowing exactly good and evil, made holy by loving good and despising evil,—such is every one of us in so far as the acts of others and not his own are under consideration, and when he has merely to approve or disapprove, whilst the burden of the performance of the acts is borne by other shoulders. Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, I 116

---

<sup>82</sup> Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, I 116.

On the conceptual claim, Mackie argues that for moral values to be objective, they have to be intrinsically motivating. He argues that for an action to be objectively bad, it would have an intrinsic “not-to-be-doneness somehow built into it.”<sup>83</sup> When we discuss a moral fact, our concept of them is that of a categorical imperative which are, on the normative side, independent of any person’s contingent desires. For instance, “one ought not to harm others for pleasure” is a claim which has a categorical imperative built into it independent of anyone’s contingent desires (i.e., an intrinsic reason to not harm others for pleasure). In other words, they would have to have a categorical imperative somehow built into them.<sup>84</sup> My reconstruction of the argument from *The Subjectivity of Values*, is the following:

1. Things are either categorically imperative (e.g., desires such as thirst and hunger) or not categorically imperative (e.g., laws of nature and physics).
2. Things that are independent from us are not categorically imperative.
3. Things that are independent from us are objective.
4. There is nothing that is independent from us that is also categorically imperative.
5. From 2, 3 and 4, objective things are not categorically imperative.
6. If morality is objective, then from 5, it follows that morality is not categorically imperative (i.e., “not-to-be-doneness” is not built into it).
7. Morality is categorically imperative.
- ∴ From 6 and 7, morality is not objective.

If Mackie thinks that objective moral values are “queer,” in comparison to “our ordinary ways of knowing,” then where does he think they came from? In *The Miracle of Theism*, Mackie imports the argument from queerness to argue that moral objectivity rests more on the assumption that an omniscient God exists than on any other metaphysical assumptions:

Objective intrinsically prescriptive features, supervening upon natural ones, constitute so odd a cluster of qualities and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events, without an all-powerful god to create them. If, then, there are such intrinsically prescriptive objective values, they make the existence of a god more probable than it would have been without them. Thus, we have, after all, a defensible inductive argument from morality to the existence of a god. J.L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, 155

---

<sup>83</sup> “If there were objective principles of right and wrong, any wrong (possible) course of action would have not-to-be-doneness somehow built into it.” J.L. Mackie, *The Subjectivity of Values*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> By categorical imperative I mean an unconditional obligation built into the principles of right and wrong that has “to-be-doneness” or “not-to-be-doneness” built into it. The normative force within the categorical imperative need not be dependent on any person’s contingent desires.

We have “a defensible argument from morality to the existence of God” because if morality were objective, then there needs to be a powerful being who could manage its enforcement, and because it is strange for “natural features [to] simply do in themselves constitutes reasons for or against the action that involve them.” If that were the case; then objectivism would be a “doctrine that an action’s being of a certain naturally identifiable kind may in itself be a reason for doing it or for not doing it.” In other words, it would need to be true “that there may be a fact of a peculiarly moral kind.”<sup>85</sup> But, according to Mackie:

This is a mere reformulation, which leaves the substance of the problem unchanged. It will then be this alleged moral fact itself that is the initially puzzling item, which the existence of a god may be postulated to explain. J.L Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism*, 116

Towards the end of *The Subjectivity of Values*, Mackie surmises a few possible origins of the belief in objective morality, one of which is Christianity. Both Nietzsche and Mackie are doubtless that (at least) some modern Western moral beliefs (despite claims of secularity) are “traceable to the theological ethics of Christianity.” Mackie appeals to the “stress on quasi-imperative notions on what ought to be done or on what is wrong in a sense that is close to that of ‘forbidden’ surely relics of divine commands.” Similarly, Nietzsche (by analyzing genealogically) argues in a section titled *To The Admirers of Objectiveness* in *The Dawn of Day* that children observe in the people whom they grew up around “certain varied and strong feelings, with but little subtle discernment and inclination for intellectual justice and has therefore employed his best powers and his most precious time in imitating these feelings ... Under the domination of this experience, which he is powerless to shake off, he admires neutrality of feeling or “objectivity” ... and he cannot believe that even this neutrality is merely the product of education and habit.”<sup>86</sup>

In this case, Mackie’s argument is strongly related to Nietzsche’s position: both argue that the belief in objective morality is likely the product of (or at least has been influenced by) the

---

<sup>85</sup> Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism, God and the Objectivity of Values*.

<sup>86</sup> Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, II 111.

assumption that an omniscient and omnibenevolent God exists. This shows striking resemblance to the slaves in slave morality and their desire for equality. The slaves claimed that their God-given morality is the right one, and they desire to generalize it to everyone unconditionally.

## The Christianity of Modern Secular Morality

Essentially, the primary concern for Nietzsche is when a given set of values or a system of morality becomes a threat on human greatness and human excellence.<sup>87</sup> For example, contemporary moral philosophers, such as Peter Singer, “treat everyone’s sentience and suffering as of decisive moral importance, aligning themselves firmly with the egalitarian moral thinking central to Christianity.”<sup>88</sup> It comes as no surprise that “a popular conceit in recent Anglophone philosophy, familiar from the writings of Derek Parfit and Peter Singer in particular, is that until philosophical ethics frees itself from “religion,” it will not be able to make progress.”<sup>89</sup> They “think of themselves as vanguards in this movement, a claim rich in irony for any student of Nietzsche.”<sup>90</sup>

Leiter is alluding to the fact that considering everyone’s suffering “as of decisive importance” is fundamentally “Christian to its core, as any Nietzschean would notice.”<sup>91</sup> It is Christian because Christianity, according to Nietzsche, has made the abolition of suffering a top priority. For Nietzsche however, “one must *desire* both [pleasure and pain] if one is to achieve anything.”<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche associates the need to maximize pleasure and minimize pain as being common in “metaphysicians and religious people.” It comes as no surprise that one might object

---

<sup>87</sup> Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality*, Nietzsche’s Project: the revaluation of values.

<sup>88</sup> Brian Leiter, *THE DEATH OF GOD AND THE DEATH OF MORALITY*, pp. 1.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pp. 311. In the first section I discussed Nietzsche’s notion of pleasure and pain as a side effect of the will to power. It lays “in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance.”



to Leiter by arguing that Singer, for example, is as far as he could be from being a religious person. Leiter is not asserting that Singer is a Christian, but that the morality which he promotes is, as Leiter puts it, “Christian to the core.” Nietzsche believes that “even morality is so important to them because they see in it an essential condition for the abolition of suffering.”<sup>93</sup> The tendency to regard religion as bearing no relevance on moral theories, and to think of one’s moral philosophy—especially if it is a morality of utility—as something which religion stands in the way of, is not anything new. Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nietzsche witnessed a similar sentiment by English moral philosophers:

When the English really believe that they 'intuitively' know all by themselves what is good and what is evil; and when, as a result, they think that they do not need Christianity to guarantee morality any more, this is itself just the result of the domination of the Christian value judgment and an expression of the strength and depth of this domination. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, IX  
5

In this way, Nietzsche considers a morality that rests on promoting utility; generalizes itself unconditionally (i.e., claims of objectivity); and places the abolition of suffering at the top of its hierarchy, as a derivative of Christian morality. This does not mean that Nietzsche denies that an immoral action should be avoided, and a moral action encouraged. What he denies is the claim that moral judgements are founded on truths. He writes, “I deny morality in the same way I deny alchemy, *i.e.* I deny its hypothesis ... I also deny immorality—not that innumerable people feel immoral, but that there is any true reason why they should feel so.” So, Nietzsche here is not arguing that when an action is thought of as ‘immoral,’ it actually is not immoral; instead, his concern is specifically on the notion that there is a “true” reason why we should *feel* that it is immoral.

## Creation of Values – Nietzschean Dialogue

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

We have argued that Nietzsche's goal is to critique morality and to engage in a revaluation of values. It is, however, not a simple task since it is unclear how one should reevaluate one's values. For instance, at times, Nietzsche seems to be gravitating towards master morality and the noble aristocratic way of living. In other times, he seems to be arguing for a revaluation that leads to entirely new values, radically different from slave and Christian morality. In order to determine which is the right way, we must first understand what a moral action for Nietzsche is. Up till now, we have discussed Nietzsche's critique of various moralities and his rejection of objective morality and moral values being intrinsically valuable. What then does Nietzsche take to be a moral action? In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche provides a Socratic dialect between himself and another person on what constitutes a moral action. The other person provides a definition of what he takes to be a moral action:

When a human being judges '*this is right*' and then infers '*therefore it must be done*,' and then proceeds to *do* what he has thus recognized as right and designated as necessary—then the essence of his action is *moral*.<sup>94</sup>

Nietzsche asks:

When you judge "this is right," that is an action, too. Might it not be possible that one could judge in a moral and in an immoral manner?<sup>95</sup>

The other person responds:

Because this is what my conscience tells me: and the voice of conscience is never immoral, for it alone determines what is to be moral.<sup>96</sup>

Nietzsche is suspicious of people when they appeal to their conscience as an infallible judge on what is right and what is wrong. He replies:

But why do you listen to the voice of your conscience? And what gives you the right to consider such a judgement true and infallible? For this *faith*—is there no conscience for that? ... A conscience behind your conscience?<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, IV 335.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

Now Nietzsche tries to tell the other person that one's beliefs of what is right and what is wrong are not simply the result of listening to one's conscience and deciding '*this is right*' and then inferring '*therefore it must be done.*' Conscience is not a pure indicator of right and wrong; there are all kinds of factors that influence it. He writes:

Your judgement "this is right" has a pre-history in your instincts, likes, dislikes, experiences, and lack of experiences. "*How did it originate there?*" you must ask, and then also: "What is it that impels me to listen to it?" You can listen to its commands like a good soldier who hears his officer's commands ... Or like a dunderhead who obeys because no objection occurs to him. In short, there are a hundred ways in which you can listen to your conscience.<sup>98</sup>

Nietzsche now makes his point that being suspicious of one's conscience is necessary if one wants to know why one thinks a certain action is moral or immoral. The judgements we make that something is right or wrong are influenced by many factors including the fact that this is what we have been taught since childhood:

But that you take this or that judgement for the voice of conscience—in other words, that you feel something to be right—may be due to the fact that you have never thought much about yourself and simply accepted blindly that what you had been *told* ever since your childhood was right.<sup>99</sup>

Now Nietzsche tells the person how his understanding of what is moral would be "spoiled" once the person reflects more subtly and observes his thoughts better:

If you had thought more subtly, observed better, and learned more ... your understanding of *the manner in which moral judgements have originated* would spoil these grounds for you.<sup>100</sup>

The person tells Nietzsche that Kant's categorical imperative would be a solution to this problem. Since conscience is not always reliable, then abiding by a categorical imperative would not put us in the risk of letting our conscience be the only method of judging. After all, the categorical imperative tells us that we must always follow an objective, rationally necessary and unconditional principle despite any natural desires or inclinations we may have to the contrary.<sup>101</sup> Nietzsche

---

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Johnson, Robert and Cureton, Adam, "Kant's Moral Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta.

rejects the categorical imperative: he asserts that it is selfish to judge based on a categorical imperative. He writes,

What? You admire the categorical imperative within you? The “firmness” of your so-called moral judgement? This “unconditional” feeling that “here everyone must judge as I do?”<sup>102</sup>

Now Nietzsche provides another reason of why he rejects the categorical imperative. He tells the person that by following the categorical imperative, he is not discovering himself nor creating his own ideal:

It is selfish to experience one’s own judgement as a universal law; and this selfishness is blind, petty, and frugal because it betrays that you have not yet discovered yourself nor created for yourself an ideal of your own, your very own.<sup>103</sup>

Here, there seems to be a tension between rejecting the categorical imperative because it is selfish; yet saying that one should create an ideal of one’s very own. However, the selfishness here, which Nietzsche is referring to, lies in the fact that in the categorical imperative, we are supposed to act in accordance to a maxim where we *will* that it should become *a universal law*. In other words, I selfishly will that the absolute and unconditional maxim—which *I* believe should be obeyed—should become a universal law which. One might be curious that if Nietzsche rejects all of these ways of deciding what is moral, then does this imply that he has not any notion of which actions should be avoided, and which ones should be encouraged? In the previous section, I have argued that Nietzsche rejects the idea that moral judgements are founded on truth. However, Nietzsche has more to say; he does in fact believe that some actions are to be avoided and some are to be encouraged. However, it is not because he judges them to be moral or immoral:

I should not, of course, deny—unless I were a fool—that many actions which are called immoral should be avoided and resisted; and in the same way that many which are called moral should be performed and encouraged; but I hold that in both cases these actions should be performed from motives other than those which have prevailed up to the present time. We must learn anew in order that at last, perhaps very late in the day, we may be able to do something more: feel anew. Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day*, 103

---

<sup>102</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, IV 335.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

What he rejects is specifically the motives of these actions up to his present time. In other words, he rejects the motive of action if it is based on an appeal to conscience, to a God, to a categorical imperative, and so on. The better way for Nietzsche is for us to reevaluate our own values based on our own judgement and criteria of what we consider good and bad:

Let us therefore *limit* ourselves to the purification of our opinions and valuations and to the *creation of our own new tables of what is good* and let us stop brooding about the “moral value of our action”! We, [unlike the great majority], *want to become those we are*—human beings who are new ... who give themselves laws, who create themselves.<sup>104</sup>

Admittedly, Nietzsche does not leave us with much to work with. So far, he rejects a morality that is not based on one’s own conception of what is good, and he recommends that one creates his/her own morality. He casts a distinct suspicion on our “conscience” being a reliable measure of what is good and what is bad: other factors contribute to the way our conscience guides us. He does not provide a system of morality or a moral theory. Though he admires master morality to a certain extent, he considers it to be an early phase of history, where people respected their impulses, but have not yet developed the ability to take a stand on one’s impulses. He understands that there is no returning to it after the slave revolt in morality, which reaches its apex with Christianity. Moreover, the naiveté and lack of self-reflection of the original masters made them susceptible to their being overtaken by slave morality. Presently, in order for the modern human being to overcome itself, it must incorporate aspects of slave morality as well.

It would seem contradictory for Nietzsche to tell us we should reevaluate our own values and also provide us the values that we should adapt. If this is the case, then we are not really creating our own values; we are only adapting his values. However, in *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche explains why it matters that the individual derives values of his act from himself. Even if he does not “create a formula” he is still creative:

Ultimately, the individual derives the values of his acts from himself; because he has to interpret in a quite individual way even the words he has inherited. His interpretation of a formula at least is

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

personal, even if he does not create a formula: as an interpreter he is still creative. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 767

Ken Gemes argues that what Nietzsche is concerned about is “cultivating the plant man”: “A doctrine is needed powerful enough to work as a breeding agent”<sup>105</sup> Although the picture of what Nietzsche values is not clear, he clearly “values the cultivating of great individual and how is one to become one.” Nevertheless, he repeatedly claims that his words are only for selected ears. The work of Nietzsche, according to Gemes, “was intended as a tool for liberation. As for the liberated it is up to them to create their own individuality.” This is stated most clearly in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: “This—is now *my* way: where is yours?”<sup>106</sup> So far, we have established that Nietzsche rejects certain values and moralities and encourages the individual to create their own values. While he does not provide a way, a moral theory, or any kind of system, he most certainly regards the will to power as an essential driving force for one to create their own values and become who one is.

## Characteristics of Higher Humans

In the previous section, we have argued that Nietzsche does not provide a way or any moral theory or a system of values; instead it is the person who should create their own values. We have also argued, in previous sections, that Nietzsche’s critique of morality and call for individuals to create their values, are motivated by his concern that herd morality is not suitable for great human beings. The best we can take from Nietzsche’s critique of morality is not to try and construct an entirely new system of values, radically different from the present one; instead, we should note what characteristics, what qualities does he see as necessary for human excellence. All throughout Nietzsche’s work, he discusses many characteristics which he considers as distinctive of higher

---

<sup>105</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, IV 1.1.

<sup>106</sup> Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, III 3.

humans. I have found four characteristics that are mentioned the most: namely, solitude, the seeking of heavy responsibility, resilience, and life-affirmation. In this section, I will discuss each and provide necessary details.

First, the higher human is solitary: “The concept of greatness entails being noble, wanting to be by oneself, being able to be different, standing alone and having to live independently.”<sup>107</sup> Solitude is an essential characteristic of the higher human, according to Nietzsche. A solitary individual “knows how to make enemies everywhere,” he “constantly contradicts the great majority not through words but through deeds.”<sup>108</sup> In *Ecce Homo*, he discusses his own biography and how solitude played a role in his own life. He writes, “You cannot have any nerves ... Even suffering from solitude is an objection, – I have only ever suffered from multitudes.”<sup>109</sup> It is not an easy state to be in; Nietzsche believed that not everyone is brave enough for solitude. It forces a person to confront his own thoughts, as Andre Gide wrote, “The fear of finding oneself alone—that is what they suffer from—and so they don’t find themselves at all.”<sup>110</sup> After all, human beings are social creatures, so being able to handle solitude is not something that we are born with. It requires one to be brave enough, to enter territories he is not accustomed to. One of the benefits of solitude is that it frees one from being constantly influenced, both consciously and unconsciously, by the herd. Once one appreciates and desires solitude, one places oneself in a good position where one can self-critique and evaluate one’s impulses and desires.<sup>111</sup>

Secondly, the higher human “instinctively seeks heavy responsibilities.”<sup>112</sup> He does not seek responsibility in an arbitrary manner; instead, he demonstrates “a long logic in all of his

---

<sup>107</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 212.

<sup>108</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 944.

<sup>109</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, II 10.

<sup>110</sup> Andre Gide, *The Immoralist*, 127.

<sup>111</sup> It makes it easier for a person to think deeply and mindfully reevaluate his/her life away from the masses.

<sup>112</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 944.

activates, hard to survey because of its length.” The responsibility he adapts is based on a meaningful goal he is pursuing.<sup>113</sup> A higher human who is exemplary when it comes to bearing responsibility, according to Nietzsche, is Napoleon:

With natures like ... Napoleon, one gets some notion of "disinterested" work on their marble, whatever the cost in men. On this road lies the future of the highest men: to bear the greatest responsibility and *not* collapse under it.- Hitherto, the delusions of inspiration were almost always needed in order not to lose one's *faith in one's right and one's hand*. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 975

Responsibility is a great manifestation of how one's will to power can be sublimated: sublimation in the sense of being autonomous, being in control of one's actions and impulses, not suppressing one's impulses and desires, but being in control of them – it can be thought of as an example of extreme ownership of one's decisions and outcomes. One can argue that it seems a little contradictory for Nietzsche to praise responsibility, and yet, as I have discussed in the deed vs. doer section, reject the notion of free will as a phenomenon where an agent consciously wills to take an action. However, Nietzsche is not against making a separation between doer and deed; instead, he is against the idea that a doer has the libertarian ability to do otherwise. When he discusses responsibility, he argues for responsibility as a part of one's will to power. Although a human being possesses various and competing instincts, such instincts are all part of the will to power, the most fundamental instincts: “The instincts for freedom (in my language: the will to power); only here the material upon which forgiving and ravishing nature of this force vents itself is man himself.”<sup>114</sup>

Thirdly, the higher human is mentally resilient, he is able to withstand difficult conditions and find pleasure in his unescapable suffering, “he guesses what remedies avail against what is

---

<sup>113</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 962. The higher man seeks responsibility and executes tasks in a logical way not in an arbitrary way. In *Ecce Homo, The Case of Wagner* 4, Nietzsche writes about himself and how feels a responsibility resting on him: “When an unspeakable responsibility rests on me, – when no words can be too gentle, no look respectful enough for me. Because I am carrying the destiny of humanity on my shoulders.”

<sup>114</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, II 18.



harmful.”<sup>115</sup> This is best exemplified in Nietzsche’s discussion of his own life. He writes about how much he has endured pain in his life, yet he never felt that his suffering is evil. In fact, quite the opposite:

[Sickness] can be an energetic stimulus to life ... This is, in fact, how that long period of illness looks to me now: I discovered life anew ... myself included, I tasted all good and even small things in ways that other people cannot easily do ... [Indeed,] the years of my lowest vitality were the ones when I stopped being a pessimist. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* I 2

Nietzsche had been ill his whole life; he lived in solitude and moved to a new place every few months. At the age of 44, after allegedly witnessing a horse being whipped in the Italian city of Turin, Nietzsche had a mental breakdown which he never recovered from. It is reported that when Nietzsche saw the horse being whipped; he clung tightly to the neck of the horse, wailing and refusing to let it go. Prior to his unrecoverable mental breakdown, his books could not find publishers who were willing to publish them, so Nietzsche had to borrow money from family and friends in order to have them published.<sup>116</sup> Yet, despite all of this, he had an astonishingly powerful and positive approach to life. In the first section, *The Will to Power*, I argued that for Nietzsche, pleasure is not something which a person should aim at, instead pleasure lies precisely “in the fact that the will is never satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance.” In this way, Nietzsche’s sublimation of his will to power to become more resilient made him find pleasure in his illness and physical suffering. Why did Nietzsche find pleasure in his suffering? Simply because he pursued what he found meaningful. Suffering itself is not the problem, it is the absence of a goal or a meaning in one’s life that makes the suffering a problem. In *The Genealogy of Morality* Nietzsche writes that:

“Man, the bravest animal and most prone to suffer, does not deny suffering as such: he wills it, he even seeks it out, provided he is shown a meaning for it, a purpose of suffering. The

---

<sup>115</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, I 2.

<sup>116</sup> After his breakdown, it is reported that Nietzsche never spoke a word again. It is known that he ended up living with his sister in her house for the rest of his life. It is also reported that Nietzsche’s breakdown was caused by syphilis.

meaninglessness of suffering, not the suffering, was the curse that has so far blanketed mankind.” Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, III 28

On the contrary, Nietzsche saw displeasure and suffering as a price that must be paid for his growth and abundance.

Forth, the higher human is life-affirming. He affirms life with all of its joy and suffering. He would gladly will the repetition of his life, with its good and bad, through eternity. The clearest conception Nietzsche has for life-affirmation is what he comes to call *amor fati*: “My formula for human greatness is *amor fati*: that you do not want anything to be different, not forward, not backwards, not for all eternity. Not just to tolerate necessity, still less to conceal it ... but to *love* it.”<sup>117</sup> And in *The Will to Power* he writes:

“it is richness in personality, abundance in oneself, overflowing and bestowing, instinctive good health and affirmation of oneself, that produce great sacrifice and great love ... and if one is not firm and brave within oneself, one has nothing to bestow and cannot stretch out one's hand to protect and support.” Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 338

Nietzsche sees life-affirmation best exemplified in Nietzsche’s favorite Greek God, *Dionysian*: “The world “*Dionysian*” means: an urge to unity ... an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same ... and calls good even the most terrible and most questionable qualities of life.”<sup>118</sup> In the following passage from *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche connects *amor fati*, *Dionysian*, and life-affirmation in one passage:

“*My new path to a “Yes”* ... such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this—to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection—it wants the eternal circulation: —the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence—my formula for this is *amor fati*.” Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1041

Although it may be inconsistent that we should “not want anything to be different”; yet Nietzsche also proposed that we need to be more autonomous and we need to reevaluate our values. I take

---

<sup>117</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo, Why I am So Clever*, 10.

<sup>118</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 1050.

this not to mean that we should not want anything to be different in the sense that we should not try to change anything in our lives; but instead, as an approach to life where we try our best to reevaluate our own values, be solitary, adapt responsibility, affirm our lives; and if we end up in an undesirable place in life, a place we did not anticipate—such as a chronic illness in the case of Nietzsche—then we should not want anything to have been different, because we tried our best with great effort, we lived a brave life; therefore, we should not feel bad for circumstances that are out of our control. Therefore, simply: we need to work hard in order to be in control of ourselves physically and mentally; and especially on our conscience since it influences our decisions of what is right and what is wrong.

## Conclusion – Our Conscience

In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche discusses how we need to develop an ability to control our conscience, which helps us to notice our drives and impulses, and make sure that when we critique and manage them, we are not turning an evil eye towards them, as that would be a kind of self-hatred. Conscience, Nietzsche writes, “is *not*, as people may believe, ‘the voice of God in man’: it is the instinct of cruelty that turns back after it can no longer discharge itself externally.” One way to interpret Nietzsche’s thought here is to say that human beings simply desire to undergo suffering. Another interpretation is to say that human beings find pleasure in *inflicting* suffering on themselves. According to Christopher Janaway, Nietzsche is arguing the latter: we are gratified not as recipients, but as agents of suffering. For example, in *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes that “anyone who despises himself will still respect himself as a despiser.”<sup>119</sup> Christopher Janaway argues that “being despised is unpleasant and distressing, and being despised by oneself instead of by another presumably does not alter that fact; but in so far as one identifies with the

---

<sup>119</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 78.

subject of the despising relation, to some extent split off from oneself as its object, one can stand in a positive affective attitude to oneself, that of respecting.”<sup>120</sup> There are two central thoughts regarding Janaway’s interpretation and Nietzsche’s idea about cruelty and its turning back against the self. First, human beings have an instinctive drive from which they tend to gain pleasure from inflicting suffering.<sup>121</sup> Second, when human beings are prevented from discharging their impulses and instinctive drives outwardly, they discharge them inwardly. Because of these two, it may be best if we try to gain more self-knowledge so that we have a better understanding of our impulses and drives and prioritize some of them to win over others.

When we have a better understanding of our impulses and drives, and that some of our drives are competing with each other, we can recognize the ones that we closely identify with. We can let some of our competing impulses win out and not others, and we can become better at restraining the ones that we do not identify with. In order to accomplish this type of inner psychological analysis and evaluation, we need a great deal of self-knowledge which we can attain by following Nietzsche’s idea of the higher man: namely, being solitary, responsible, resilient, and life-affirming. We may be in a situation where we are not able to be in a state of solitude—e.g., having to take care of dependents, such as family members, for instance—in which case, we may choose to be more responsible in helping, more resilient against the difficulties we face, and more accepting of circumstances that are out of our control. We can try to adapt and strengthen all of the four characteristics I listed, and if we are not able to adapt all of them due to circumstances that are out of our control; then we can do our best to identify the ones which we are able to adapt, and work on strengthening them.

---

<sup>120</sup> Janaway, *Nietzsche and Morality: Guilt, Bad Conscience, and Self-Punishment in Nietzsche’s Genealogy*.

<sup>121</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, II 6.

## **Bibliography**

- Gide, André. *The Immoralist*. Translated by Dorothy Bussy. United States of America: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1949.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith. Great Britain: R. R. Clark Ltd, Edingburgh, 1929.
- Leiter, Brian. "Nietzsche's Moral and Political Philosophy." Edited by Edward N. Zalta. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2015.
- . "THE DEATH OF GOD AND THE DEATH OF MORALITY - Forthcoming in a Special Issue of The Monist on Nietzsche," March 12, 2017.
- . *The Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Nietzsche On Morality*. Routledge, 2002.
- Leiter, Brian, and John Richardson, eds. *Oxford Readings in Philosophy Nietzsche*. Oxford University Press, March 08, 2001.
- Leiter, Brian, and Neil Sinhababu, eds. *Nietzsche and Morality*. New York: Oxford University Press, April 12, 2007.
- Mackie, J.L. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong. Ch1, The Subjectivity of Values*. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.
- Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Canada: Batoche Books, 2001.
- . *The Miracle of Theism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. 1st ed. Vol. 8. 19 vols. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Stanford University Press, March 19, 2014.
- . *Human All Too Human A Book for Free Spirits*. Translated by Helen Zimmern. Morrison & Gibb Limited, Edinburgh, 1910.

- . *Nietzsche On the Genealogy of Morality Student Edition*. Edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson. Translated by Carol Diethe. Revised Student Edition. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, October 30, 2006.
- . *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Translated by Adrian Del Caro. 1st ed. Vol. 8. 19 vols. The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche. Stanford University Press, March 19, 2014.
- . *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and Other Writings*. Edited by Aaron Ridely and Judith Norman. Translated by Judith Norman. Fourth. Cambridge University Press, November 21, 2005.
- . *The Dawn of Day*. Project Gutenberg, 2012. [https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39955/39955-pdf.pdf?session\\_id=3739aff2f02e6d039e7648465b847f3df29ea23a](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39955/39955-pdf.pdf?session_id=3739aff2f02e6d039e7648465b847f3df29ea23a).
- . *The Gay Science*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. Vintage Books Edition. New York: Random House, Inc, January 12, 1974.
- . *The Portable Nietzsche*. Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. United States of America: Penguin Books, January 27, 1977.
- . *The Will to Power*. Edited by Walter Kaufmann. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and Hollingdale R. J. Vintage Books Edition. New York: Random House, Inc, August 12, 1968.
- . *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Penguin Books, November 30, 1961.
- Plato. *Five Dialogues*. Translated by G. M. A Crube. Second. Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002.
- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World As Will And Idea*. Translated by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp. Seventh Edition. Vol. 1. 3 vols. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 2011.